



Report to: General Committee

Report Date: June 16, 2026

SUBJECT: Urban Forestry Management Plan and Urban Forestry Management Strategy

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REVIEWED BY: Alice Wong – Director, Operations Ext 4875
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RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report entitled Urban Forestry Management Plan (UFMP) and the Urban Forestry Management Strategy (UFMS) be received; and
2. That Council receive the recommended program implementation actions identified in the UFMP; and
3. That City Staff review the Right-of-Way (ROW) cross sections and streetscape guidelines in new developments to promote adequate soil volumes to maximize tree health/growth where possible; and
4. That Staff implement a Young Tree program in 2027 to promote healthy, resilient young trees and increase tree canopy subject to the annual budget review process; and
5. That Operations engage the services of two (2) additional arboricultural service contractor crews for the remainder of 2026, utilizing the City's existing contractor, in the estimated amount of \$369,797 (inclusive of HST), with funding to be identified and approved by the City Treasurer to address priority, in accordance with the City's Expenditure Control Policy; and
6. That staff observe and monitor the progress of the two (2) additional arboricultural service contractor crews in 2026, for a potential extension of the services in 2027, subject to the annual budget review process; and
7. That staff report back to General Committee in the fall of 2027 on the result of the arboricultural service and the future forestry service delivery strategy inclusive of the funding impacts, and
8. That any required ongoing funding and resource considerations be addressed during the annual budget process; and
9. That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Markham continues to enjoy prosperous urban growth while safeguarding our urban forest. To ensure our green assets can thrive, a comprehensive management tool and long term strategy is required to guide decision making. Kuntz Forestry Consulting Inc. was engaged by the Operations Department, Parks Horticulture and Forestry Division to undertake an UFMP. The UFMP, along with the associated UFMS, supports a long - term framework for managing Markham's growing urban forest. The UFMP identifies current service gaps, resource limitations, and necessary actions to sustain and expand the City's tree canopy.

Key insights from the consulting team include:

- * The urban forest is highly valued by the City of Markham and its residents
- * Our residents are passionate about how we should manage the urban forest
- * The overall health of the urban forest is unclear.
- * The state of the current urban forest is important to determine next steps
- * Our forestry program has strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and potential threats we need to consider.
- * There are gaps in our current programs and identifying them will be a key outcome
- * Markham needs both a five-year and a ten-year plan to manage our urban forest if we are to be successful in reaching our tree canopy target.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to present the key findings and recommendations of the UFMP and UFMS, to seek approval to implement the 2026 UFMP actions, and to inform Council of considerations identified in the UFMP for future years.

BACKGROUND:

The current inventory of publicly owned trees under the direct care of Operations Forestry, (which we refer to as the urban forest) is approximately 187,000 trees. Our current inventory extends to public trees on streets, in parks and at public facilities which we actively maintain. While we have many trees in city woodlots and valley lands, our inventory does not include trees in these areas. They fall under a TRCA endorsed naturalized management approach where trees remain where they fall and become important habitat, and regeneration takes place naturally. The UFMP includes an accompanying woodlot management strategy to identify risks and opportunities to inform decision making in managing and protecting these important natural assets.

Resources to maintain and grow the urban forest must reflect not only the current inventory but also the future trees added through ongoing development. The UFMP has identified gaps and provides recommendations for improvements which will improve the health of the urban forest and increase resident satisfaction with our approved service delivery.

OPTIONS/DISCUSSION:

Tree canopy and the Council approved goal of 30% have been at the heart of nearly every discussion about urban forestry and was the subject of review and forecasting in the UFMP. A comprehensive review of the current state of the urban forest, with current development requirements and the availability of land to plant more trees was conducted as part of the UFMP. With the City's current canopy at 18.5% within the urban boundary, reaching 30% by 2031 is not

achievable under current practices. Additional review and resources will be required. Based on the consultant's conservative projections for the City's canopy growth, the forecasted date to achieve 30% canopy would be 2124. The UFMP states that additional canopy growth is reliant upon several factors and is not as straightforward as planting more trees. Increased soil volumes, young tree maintenance, and private tree planting all directly affect canopy growth and influence how quickly the City can reach its goal. No single change will shift canopy more significantly than growing healthy trees with care and maintenance beginning when they are planted.

Residents are passionate about trees and the many benefits that they provide with a resounding 89% of public survey respondents stating that trees are an essential element for their health and well-being. An additional 82% support an increased investment in initiatives to expand tree canopy. On an annual basis, the city receives approximately 4,500 work orders requesting service which are largely focused on pruning but also include wasp nests, insect issues, sightline issues, fenceline clearing, sucker growth and species selection. The current resources are unable to address this high volume of requests, which range from 35 to 846 in a single month resulting in inspections taking up to 6 months to complete and the subsequent identified work taking up to 14 months. These timelines do not meet resident expectations resulting in follow-up calls adding to the backlog of work orders. Tree inspections identify and measure the required work before assigning it to qualified arborists. However, if arborists are redirected to conduct inspections, they cannot complete work orders, causing delays.

Tree mortality is always a concern when managing a diverse urban forest and has many factors which contribute to it, none more important than soil volume for new trees. Trees in an urban streetscape require careful consideration when evaluating the road cross-section and balancing competing amenities. The UFMP identifies adequate soil volumes, referred to as 'space for trees' as a critical component of maintaining and expanding the urban forest canopy. Adequate soil volume needs to start at the planning stage where the right species of trees and space for trees must be prioritized as green infrastructure and included in the allocation of space.

Planting trees and ensuring the necessary resources for them to grow is an important step for success in growing the urban forest. The consulting team acknowledged the City's efforts to care for new trees with a two-year contractor warranty program as a good first step but noted that it relies on the contractor's efforts to make it successful. The first three to four years of a new tree's life are critical to not only survival but to continued health and ability to withstand environmental stress such as drought conditions. The UFMP notes that young tree maintenance is a key to the success of a mature and healthy urban forest.

While it seems reasonable to assume that every neighborhood has a large number of trees and equal access to canopy and the associated benefits, the consulting team discovered that this is not the case. Through the development of a "Tree-Equity Index" they used a scoring system to rate which areas of the city had greater access to trees and what limiting factors impeded us from making significant changes. This study emphasized the need to focus time and resources on addressing tree-equity concerns, as well as understanding the limitations of improving them.

The UFMP identifies the city's Block Tree Pruning program as a cost-effective preventative maintenance program which are in alignment with our municipal partners. This program

proactively schedules every tree in a city block to receive a prescribed level of pruning every 8 years providing improved tree health, storm-resiliency and protection from damage.

CONCLUSION:

Kuntz Forestry Consulting Inc. concluded that Markham's urban forest is generally in fair to good condition, noting that sustained and measured investment will be required to ensure growth and canopy increases to reach the Council endorsed 30% tree canopy target. The key drivers for success can be summarized as follows.

Make space for trees by addressing soil volumes, diversity of species planted and planning that includes tree planting aligned with our canopy goal

The UFMP recommends a review of the city standards and procedures to recognize and prioritize trees as green infrastructure. Updated street cross sections will promote adequate soil volumes to grow healthy trees with streetscape guidelines reflecting adequate space for trees in cooperation with hard surfaces. Consideration is required to explore opportunities for new developments to include tree planting which aligns with our canopy expectations.

Growing healthy young trees so they develop into healthy mature trees is a key component of growing our canopy and enhancing the benefits that trees offer our residents

Establishing a healthy young tree takes about 4-5 years after planting. During this period, developing a strong root system and structure is critical. The establishment of a Young Tree Maintenance Program will ensure that trees receive structural pruning, watering, and mulching to establish them as healthy young trees.

Proactively manage tree maintenance to enhance resilience to storms and pests

The City's Block Tree Pruning program is a cost-effective program to proactively prune city trees for structural health and resilience. During the pruning cycle, every tree in the city block is assessed, pruned and updated in our inventory. The program ideally runs during winter months, when leaves are off the trees. This allows for an excellent assessment of tree structure and overall health. The UFMP notes that Markham's program is effective and recommends continuing this maintenance for the foreseeable future.

Enhance the current resources available for service, focusing on both immediate and long-term results

To immediately and sustainably deal with the high volume of resident requests for tree service, the UFMP recommends the engagement of two additional arboricultural service contractor crews to address this service level deficit. The current number of resident requests for tree service has remained largely unchanged for many years and impedes the ability of the Operations Department to address issues in a manner that is satisfactory to our residents. Sustained resourcing and funding is required to affect productive change in the backlog and ongoing requests for service.

Strengthening the management and staffing resources of the Forestry unit to drive the deliverables of the UFMP

The UFMP identifies several significant gaps in resources which directly affect the ability to implement the UFMP recommendations to safeguard and grow our green infrastructure.

Triaging requests for service through inspection is essential to timely work order completion. With a wide range of requests and the resources required to complete them, timely inspection, consolidation of similar work, geographically grouped, administration of various existing and proposed maintenance programs, more inspection and oversight in the field is required. An additional inspector is recommended in 2027 to qualify and quantify work for crews to maximize productivity and accelerate field inspection for resident requests.

Strategic and long-term planning capacity requires dedicated resources and the UFMP recommends the addition of a manager of urban forestry in 2027. The City's urban forest needs a dedicated strategic leader to collaborate with all city departments focusing on providing adequate space for trees to grow well while moving our canopy closer to the 30% Council approved goal. The urban forest requires comprehensive planning and focus on cyclical pest mitigation strategies, enhancing tree growth and driving resident focused service excellence. A manager of urban forestry is instrumental for the growth and success of the urban forest and will play a key role in implementing the UFMP in protecting, maintaining and growing our urban forest.

The UFMP also identified other gaps in the current staff resources of the Forestry unit within the Operations Department which have been prioritized in order of greatest impact to service delivery. The UFMP recommends two additional city arborists be hired with the related equipment to oversee growth inclusive of the Future Urban Area.

Implementing the 2026 UFMP recommendations will enable the City to improve service levels, reduce risk, and strengthen preventive maintenance practices while positioning the urban forest for healthy long-term growth.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The tree program at the City includes a number of components which all contribute to growing the City's tree canopy. As part of the 2026 budget, the City invested \$2.1M to increase Markham's tree canopy by planting trees and supporting programs such as the annual boulevard tree replacement, Trees for Tomorrow, LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) and Backyard Tree Planting programs.

Currently, this is primarily supported by the Forestry team in Operations Parks consisting of: 1 Supervisor, 2 Working Supervisors, 1 Urban Forestry Technologist, 1 Forestry Inspector and 6 Arborists totaling 11 full-time positions. In addition, 1 external contractor-crew is deployed mainly to deal with ACR volume/requests.

The program elements recommended by the consultant include the addition of two (2) additional external arborist contractor-crews annually as well as the addition of 4 full-time City staff in future years.

Tree maintenance has historically been funded through Operations Parks growth component, which is based on additional new parkland. However, the existing model does not account for the

thousands of new street trees planted each year, nor does it adequately fund ongoing maintenance of existing trees across the community. This has resulted in increasingly reactive operations and significant delays in service delivery.

The required provision for expenses over and above the City's current model in 2026, and considerations for future years, are outlined below.

Any incremental one-time funding requirements in 2026 will be managed by the City Treasurer in conjunction with the Director of Operations to identify funding sources, while any required ongoing funding and resource considerations (2027 and beyond) will be addressed during the annual budget process.

Non-Personnel Expense Recommendations

	2026	2027	2028
Arboriculture Services Cost of 2 x Additional Crews*	\$ 369,797	\$ 551,957	\$ 574,035
Young Tree Maintenance		\$ 23,750	\$ 24,463
Total	\$ 369,797	\$ 575,707	\$ 598,498

*Mainly to undertake Forestry work related to resident ACRs

Personnel Expense Recommendations

	2026	2027	2028
Manager - Horticulture & Forestry		\$ 176,100	
Forestry Inspector		\$ 141,419	\$ 145,662
2 x Arborists			\$ 217,175
Total	\$ -	\$ 317,519	\$ 362,837

*To be referred to as part of the annual budget process

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS:

The recommended plan includes the addition of new staff in 2027 and 2028 with no staffing impact in 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:

A healthy urban forest improves ecological function, enhances neighborhood livability, strengthens climate resilience, and supports overall community wellness. Preventive maintenance programs and enhanced city standards are essential to growing and sustaining these environmental benefits.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

These initiatives closely align with two of the corporation's strategic focus areas: providing excellent Municipal Services – Parks and Recreation, and our commitment to the environment.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Financial Services, Natural Heritage, Urban Design Policy and Planning, Park Development, By-Laws, Development Engineering, Environmental Services, Diversity Equity and Inclusion, People Services have been consulted.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Alice Wong

Director, Operations

Morgan Jones

Commissioner, Community Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Urban Forestry Management Plan
Urban Forestry Management Strategy
Council Presentation